

Interoception: Learning to Listen to What Your Body Is Telling You

Interoception is the ability to sense and interpret what is happening inside your own body. Examples include hunger and fullness, thirst, heart rate, breathing, feeling hot or cold, muscle tension, fatigue or energy, and the need to use the bathroom, just to name a few.

Babies naturally listen to these cues and respond to them. When they are hungry, they cry out for nourishment. If they have gas, they cry out for help. If they need a nap, you guessed it—they cry out, signaling that they need to be comforted and put to bed.

They don't even have to think about it.

God has given them the ability to sense and respond to the cues within their bodies so that, even though they are so little, they can communicate what they need and get help in this big world.

Somehow, many of us, as sophisticated adults, have lost touch with—or simply learned to ignore—the signals our bodies are sending us. We work until we are exhausted and miss out on the rest our bodies need. We either gorge ourselves until we are uncomfortable or restrict our food so much that our bodies eventually stop trying to tell us to eat. We eat things that leave our GI systems bloated and unhappy, and we ignore the aches and pains that start out as polite whispers and eventually turn into deafening screams.

Our bodies are constantly communicating with us. The question is, **are we listening?**

Here are some ways your body may be communicating with you about the food and drink you consume. **What is your body trying to tell you?**

Note: Our bodies are complicated, and symptoms can be connected to many different influences, including stress, sleep, hydration, medications, or underlying conditions. Sometimes we can connect the wrong dots. Keep a curious mind and heart, seeking the Lord as you pay attention to what your body is telling you.

Depending on the severity or persistence of your symptoms, you may need the help of a doctor, nutritionist, or other healthcare professional. If you notice persistent, concerning, or significant symptoms, consider discussing them with your doctor. Depending on what you're experiencing, they may recommend further evaluation, such as allergy testing, evaluation for food intolerance, or a referral to a specialist.

Your body's signals are worth paying attention to—and sometimes listening well means getting professional help to understand what they're telling you.

If you're keeping a food log, you may begin to notice patterns in how your body responds to certain foods or drinks. Listen. Notice. Adapt. Then continue to listen and notice. Over time, you may begin to see patterns that can help you make informed choices about what works well for your body.

Ways our bodies may show us we are not doing well

Remember- These are clues, not conclusions

Digestion

- Bloating
- Gas
- Burping
- Heartburn or reflux
- Stomach pain or cramping
- Nausea
- Diarrhea
- Constipation
- Feeling overly full or uncomfortable after eating
- Urgency to use the bathroom

Energy, Appetite & Cravings

- Sudden energy crash
- Feeling sleepy or sluggish after eating
- Feeling shaky or weak
- Difficulty concentrating or “brain fog”
- Feeling hungry again very soon after eating
- Strong cravings, especially for something sweet
- Feeling irritable or “hangry”

Mood & Mental Well-Being

- Irritability
- Anxiety or feeling jittery
- Difficulty focusing
- Mood swings
- Feeling foggy or mentally sluggish
- Feeling unusually tired or unmotivated

Hydration & Fluid Balance

- Feeling puffy or swollen
- Temporary water retention
- Increased thirst
- Dry mouth
- Headaches
- Nasal congestion or sinus discomfort
- Feeling generally achy or uncomfortable

Hunger & Fullness

- Not recognizing when you are physically hungry
- Not noticing when you are comfortably full
- Not feeling satisfied after eating
- Feeling ravenous not long after eating

Sleep & Recovery

- Feeling overly sleepy after eating
- Difficulty falling asleep
- Restless sleep
- Reflux that interferes with sleep
- Waking during the night feeling uncomfortable or thirsty

Heart & Physical Sensations

- Racing or pounding heart
- Feeling flushed
- Feeling unusually hot
- Feeling lightheaded or dizzy
- Feeling sluggish or heavy

Skin & Other Visible Signals

- Skin breakouts (hives, rashes, etc.)
- Itching or flushing
- Changes in skin appearance
- Swelling
- Mouth irritation or sores

Joint & Muscle

- Muscle tension
- Eye twitching
- Joint pain (knees, hands, etc..)
- Feeling stiff, swollen and tender

How You Feel in Your Body - Sometimes the signal is less specific and simply sounds like:

- “I don't feel good.”
- “I'm exhausted.”
- “I feel heavy.”
- “I feel uncomfortable.”
- “I don't have the energy I expected to have.”
- “My body feels better when I eat differently.”

Here are some common foods and drinks that **may cause symptoms or affect how you feel**. Remember, we're not looking for a list of “good” and “bad” foods. We're simply getting curious about how **your** body responds.

Some common foods and drinks that may trigger symptoms for some people include highly processed foods, sugar, dairy, wheat/gluten-containing foods, spicy or acidic foods, caffeine, alcohol, and artificial sweeteners.

Some people are sensitive to certain carbohydrates called FODMAPs, which are found in foods such as onions, garlic, beans, certain fruits and vegetables, wheat, and some dairy products. For those who are sensitive, these foods can contribute to digestive symptoms such as bloating, gas, cramping, diarrhea, or constipation.

The goal isn't to assume these foods are a problem. It's to get curious. Notice how you feel after eating them and look for patterns over time. What works well for someone else may not work the same way for you.

On a happy note, we can listen to our bodies not just for signs that something isn't going well, but for signs that **it is** going well. Our bodies can show us when we're nourished, rested, hydrated, satisfied, and functioning well.

Ways our bodies may show us we are doing well

Digestion

- Comfortable digestion
- Regular bowel movements
- Little or no bloating or abdominal discomfort

Energy, Appetite & Cravings

- Steady energy throughout the day
- Waking up feeling rested
- Less of the afternoon “crash”
- Feeling physically capable and strong
- Being able to enjoy food without feeling controlled by it
- Cravings that feel manageable rather than urgent
- Enjoying a variety of foods

Mood & Mental Well-Being

- More stable mood
- Clearer thinking & better concentration
- Feeling less irritable or “hangry”
- Feeling calm and satisfied after eating

Hydration & Fluid Balance

- Feeling appropriately thirsty rather than constantly parched
- Normal hydration & noticing that water satisfies your thirst
- Feeling comfortable in your body

Hunger & Fullness

- Recognizing when you are physically hungry
- Being able to notice when you are comfortably full
- Feeling satisfied after eating
- Going an appropriate amount of time between meals without feeling ravenous
- **Feeling at peace with your food choices**

Sleep & Recovery

- Falling asleep relatively easily
- Sleeping soundly & waking refreshed
- Recovering well after physical activity

Heart & Physical Sensations

- Feeling comfortable at rest and during activity
- Stable heart rate based on activity
- Temperature regulation

Skin & Other Visible Signals

- Clear skin with fewer breakouts
- No swelling
- Wounds heal quickly

Joint & Muscle

- Fewer aches and pains
- Good strength and endurance
- Moving without unnecessary discomfort

How You Feel in Your Body - Sometimes the signal is less specific and simply sounds like:

- “I feel good.”
- “I feel light and full of energy.”
- “My body feels better when I eat differently.”

Don't just look for what feels wrong. Pay attention to what feels right, too.